

# guest column



## Intelligence Reform Is Needed Now

Our local congressman explains why he is concerned with the fate of the 9-11 Commission recommendations.

By Congressman Henry A. Waxman

Last month, the 9-11 Commission issued its final report and recommendations to the president, the Congress and the people of the United States. Acting on these recommendations is an urgent national priority.

The recommendations of the 9-11 Commission are getting plenty of attention right now. In fact, the House of Representatives has scheduled over a dozen hearings this month alone. But I have been around long enough to know what is likely to happen next. Without sustained public pressure, the Administration will delay, Congress will vacillate and we will end up with a pale shadow of the bold action recommended by the 9-11 Commission.

Indeed, this may already have started to happen.

The 9-11 Commission recommended major reforms in our intelligence agencies. The Commission proposed the creation of a National Intelligence Director who would be in charge of a new National Counterterrorism Center. The Commission also proposed giving the National

Intelligence Director the authority to wield real power such as controlling the budgets of the intelligence agencies and directing management authority over the head of the CIA and other intelligence agencies.

But this is not what the president has in mind. The president has spoken about giving the national intelligence director authority to "coordinate" and "monitor" the actions of intelligence agencies. He made no mention, however, of giving the intelligence director authority to control intelligence budgets. And he specifically said that the new intelligence director will not be in "the chain of command."

In Washington, if you have a fancy title but you are not in the chain of command and you do not control the budget, you're a figurehead. Another figurehead is not what the 9-11 Commission recommended-- or what our nation needs.

The 9-11 Commission made over 40 recommendations, covering a wide range of crucial subjects including how to protect our borders, how to safeguard our transportation

systems, how to support our first responders and how to conduct an assessment of risks and vulnerabilities.

All of these recommendations are essential. We will be doing the nation a grave disservice if we ignore any of them.

In a hearing last week before the Government Reform Committee, on which I serve as the ranking Democrat, Commissioner John Lehman warned against implementing partial solutions, saying the Commission's recommendations "are not a Chinese menu." The Commission's executive director, Philip Silicon, warned that half-measures "will be more harmful" than doing nothing at all.

Let me give you an example of why I am so concerned about the fate of these recommendations. The 9-11 Commission warned about the dangers of weapons of mass destruction getting into the hands of Al Qaeda. As the report stated:

"Al Qaeda has tried to acquire or make weapons of mass destruction for at least 10 years. There is no doubt the United States would be a prime target. Preventing the proliferation of these weapons warrants a maximum effort by strengthening counterproliferation."

Yet, late last month, the Bush Administration killed international efforts to strengthen nuclear weapons inspections. According to a front page article in the *Washington Post* on July 31:

*"In a significant shift in U.S. policy, the Bush Administration announced this week that it will oppose provisions for inspections and verification as part of an international treaty that would ban production of nuclear weapons materials...Arms-control specialists [said] the change in U.S. position will dramatically weaken any treaty and make it harder to prevent nuclear materials from falling into the hands of terrorists."*

The cynicism is breathtaking. A week after the 9-11 Commission recommends greater nonproliferation efforts, the Administration undermines an international nonproliferation treaty. And then it says it is doing everything possible to fight terrorism and implement the 9-11 Commission's recommendations.

Despite their merit, many of the ideas in the report from the 9-11 Commission have encountered resistance.

Nearly three years ago, a bipartisan group of members from my committee urged the Administration to develop a coherent strategy based on a comprehensive threat and risk assessment.

Over two years ago, Rep. David Obey, the ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee, and I wrote the Bush Administration to recommend the creation of a White House office that could unify the collection and dissemination of intelligence.

Over one year ago, Rep. Jane Harman, the ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee, introduced legislation to establish a National Director of Intelligence.

And over the past year, Rep. Jim Turner, the ranking member of the Homeland Security Committee, has repeatedly proposed initiatives that closely parallel recommendations of the 9-11 Commission.

But all of these suggestions have fallen on deaf ears.

With so much at stake, we can't let that happen again. The 9-11 Commission has spoken; now it's our turn to act. ■

*Congressman Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles) represents the 29th District, which includes Beverly Hills, and is the senior Democrat on the Government Reform Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.*